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RiverClan

Leader- **Waterstar-** Blue-grey tom with green eyes

Deputy- **Thornwillow-** Very pale she-cat with amber eyes

Medicine Cats- **Goldenflow-** Orange she-cat with deep blue eyes

Rushingwater- Blue-grey tom with brown stripes and yellow eyes

Warriors

Redwhisker- *Old,* Reddish-colored tom with pale blue eyes

Duskclaw- Reddish tabby tom with green eyes

Toothjaw- Grey long-haired tabby tom with amber eyes

Splashflight- Blue-grey she-cat with amber eyes **Apprentice, Lightpaw**

Fluffheart- Orange tom with brown eyes **Apprentice, Palepaw**

Rosedapple- Cream-colored she-cat with brown eyes **Apprentice, Soulpaw**

Shinewhisker- Golden-colored tom with brown eyes **Apprentice, Darkpaw**

Sweetpelt- Cream-colored she-cat with brown eyes

Redberry- Red-colored she-cat with blue eyes

Sunleaf- Golden-colored she-cat with brown eyes

Foxheart- Red-colored tom with brown eyes

Apprentices

Lightpaw- White she-cat with blue eyes

Darkpaw- Black tom with green eyes

Palepaw- Grey tom with yellow eyes

Soulpaw- Black and white she-cat with amber eyes

Queens

Willowfur- Brown she-cat with green eyes

Streamfrost- Light blueish-grey she-cat with green eyes **(Mother to Blazekit)**

Elders

Saptail- Orange-colored she-cat with brown eyes

Firepool- Ginger tom with amber eyes

Aquastorm- White she-cat with black stripes on her face and blue eyes

Seabreeze- Beautiful tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

Prologue: Time Goes On...

A white she-cat sat in a cave, pondering about what she had done. Her mate, Night, patted over to her. His black fur brushed hers and his deep green eyes stared into her eyes.

"Snowy? Are you okay?"

"I'm fine!" Snowy snapped.

Night recoiled. "Okay..."

"Did you do it?" a new voice sounded behind Night.

"Of course I did! Where do you think my kits are?" Snowy hissed.

"Look, I know you're sad that you had to give them away, but we're a traveling group. We can't have four kits to look after. Where did you leave them?" the cat asked.

Snowy sighed. "Frosty, I know you're not going to like this, but... I left them in the Clans."

Frost bristled. "Which one?"

"I'm not sure, but it had a stream and I saw fish in a pile."

Frost blinked. "RiverClan."

Snowy waited for yowling.

"Good." Was all Frost mewed.

"What do you mean, 'good'?"

Frost rolled his eyes. "As long as it's not ShadowClan or ThunderClan, we're good. Your kits will be well taken care of."

"Better than here?" Snowy asked.

Frost nodded. "Much better than here."

Snowy sighed in relief. "I hope they have a good life with them." She meowed.

"Me too, Snowy. Me too." Frost agreed.

Chapter 1: Waking Dreams

Lightpaw bounced excitedly.

"What are we doing now?" she mewed.

Splashflight gave a *mrrow* of amusement. "We're going to swim in the lake."

Lightpaw froze. "Swim?" she questioned.

Splashflight nodded. "That was my first reaction when I used to be an apprentice. You'll get used to it."

Lightpaw swallowed. "Okay."

Splashflight flicked her tail. "Come."

Lightpaw followed her mentor to the lake.

Splashflight plunged into the dark water. A few seconds later she rose up from the depths of the water, blinking. She cocked her head to one side.

"Why aren't you coming?"

Lightpaw felt as if the world was spinning around her.

"I-I can't. I feel as if I'm going to drown."

Splashflight scoffed. "Every apprentice feels that way. Even me. When I was an apprentice, I was so afraid that Firepool pushed me in. But of course, he didn't touch the water..."

Lightpaw wasn't listening anymore. The more she stared at the water the more terrified she felt. She wasn't even pure RiverClan!

You're not supposed to be here.

The thought chilled her from ears to tail. What if she didn't belong in this Clan? What then? The world was spinning around her.

"Lightpaw?"

Splashflight's voice sounded very far away. Lightpaw's eyes were glued on the dark water that stood below her. She imagined her and her siblings as outcasts, heading away from the Clans, never to return.

"Lightpaw!"

Lightpaw felt a hard nudge on her shoulder. But it wasn't enough to keep the darkness away.

...

Lightpaw

I blinked open my eyes. I was greeted by the pergent smell of herbs, and I wrinkled my nose.

"She's awake!" I think that was Rushingwater, our only medicine cat.

I saw two familiar cats race in, one being my mentor, and the other one being... my foster mother, Willowfur.

Splashflight patted over to me.

"Are you okay?"

I nodded. I felt alright, both physically and mentally.

Willowfur licked my forehead. "I was so worried!"

I really liked Willowfur: she made me feel as if she was my real mother. She raised me and my siblings as if we were her own.

"Lightpaw?"

I looked at Splashflight. "What?"

She hesitated. "Well, a patrol smelled ShadowClan in our territory, and I was wondering if you would like to come with me, Shinewhisker, and Darkpaw to confront them at their camp."

I blinked. "Of course I'll come. I'm well enough."

Splashflight let out a long sigh. "Alright... I'll go get them then." She stretched and patted out of the den.

"Are you sure you want to go?" A concerned voice meowed.

I turned and met Willowfur's eyes. "I'm sure."

I rested a few more moments until Splashflight came in with Shinewhisker and Darkpaw.

"Lightpaw! I was so worried about you!" Darkpaw exclaimed. "I thought you weren't going to make it."

I rolled my eyes. "Don't be ridiculous."

Shinewhisker motioned us to follow him out of the medicine den with a flick of his tail. I noticed Splashflight giving him some curious looks. Huh.

As I was walking out of camp, I felt eyes piercing me like claws. I looked around. But I didn't see anything. Must of been my imagination. My very, very, good imagination.

Chapter 2: Visions Of Madness

Soulpaw

Useless...

The word repeats in my mind as I glare at Lightpaw as she leaves the camp with Darkpaw to do StarClan- knows- what.

"Soulpaw?" My mentor, Rosedapple, is standing behind me.

I spun around. *"What?"*

I didn't mean for the reply to be snappy, but it was too late.

Rosedapple looked furious. "That is not how you talk to your mentor!" she bristled.

"I-I'm sorry." I stammered. All this was because of Lightpaw. RiverClan's perfect little apprentice with a perfect mentor. Never got in trouble once.

Rosedapple's eyes flashed. "I think we need to go see Waterstar again. I don't think normal punishments are enough anymore."

Great, just great. I've been in trouble at least seven times since being an apprentice. Waterstar won't be pleased.

Rosedapple gives me a disappointed look and starts patting towards Waterstar's den. I follow her through the busy camp: Cats entering with lots of prey in their jaws. Mates sharing tongues with each other. *Even Duskclaw looks happy today,* Soulpaw thought as she saw him practicing fighting moves with his best friend, Toothjaw. *Wish I could be as content.*

Soulpaw caught the gaze of Palepaw, her only sibling that actually cared for her. He sat at the fresh-kill pile, originally waiting for her. He sent her a questioning glance as if to say, *'In trouble again?'*

Soulpaw jerked her head in a quick nod before Rosedapple stopped her in front of the entrance of Waterstar's den.

"Come in!" It wasn't him that answered, but his deputy, Thornwillow.

Soulpaw's eyes narrowed when she noticed that Waterstar was nowhere to be seen.

Before she could open her mouth to speak, Rosedapple sent her a glare that shut her up.

"Thornwillow, where is Waterstar?" Rosedapple demanded.

"Waterstar went with Splashflight, Shinewhisker, Lightpaw, and Darkpaw to confront ShadowClan. He put me in charge of the camp."

Rosedapple nodded in understanding.

Thornwillow drew a paw over her head. "Now, what brings you here?"

"Soulpaw needs a much, much more challenging punishment since she's mastered the simple ones," Rosedapple responded coldly.

Thornwillow narrowed her pale eyes. "I see."

She turned towards me. "Soulpaw, you can leave while we discuss your punishment."

I normally would have snapped at her, but I just dipped my head. I don't want to get into more trouble.

"Yes, Thornwillow," I replied.

Thornwillow said nothing.

Palepaw was waiting outside for me.

"So, what happened?"

"Nothing I can't handle." I mewed.

Palepaw scoffed. "Sure."

I let out a sigh. "Fine, I'll just tell you. I'm in trouble again."

Palepaw rolled his eyes. "Of course you are."

"I guess I'm just not as perfect as *Lightpaw,"* I growled.

Palepaw let out a snarl. "She nearly *drowned* this morning."

"I've nearly drowned way more times than her." I retorted.

Palepaw sighed. "I'm never gonna win an argument with you."

I huffed. "So stop trying."

Palepaw opened his mouth to respond, but Fluffheart, his mentor, called for him. He sent a glare at me and then patted away.

"Soulpaw!"

I groaned. *I guess they've decided my punishment.*

I entered the leader's den. Rosedapple and Thornwillow were waiting for me.

"So, we've decided your punishment." Thornwillow began. "You will hunt for everyone today. Even the cats that are not present. Once you're done, you'll bring one piece of prey for every cat in the Clan. Even Rushingwater. Are we clear?"

I couldn't believe it. I had to bring prey to *Lightpaw*. This day was going *so* well. Wait, what if I put a little something extra in Lightpaw's piece? A mental smile forms in my mind. I changed my mind: This was going to be the best day of my life.

Chapter 3: A Chance To Live

□Lightpaw□

I was tired when we finally reached our camp again. It was almost dusk: and I was starving. Icystar was not happy with us intruding in her camp. And then the big argument began.

"How dare you let your warriors trespass on our territory!?" Waterstar snarled.

Icystar didn't blink. "I guess you think coming to other camps at your will is alright?"

Waterstar let out a low growl. "How dare-"

"Stop!" Splashflight yowled. Her yowl took everyone by surprise. All eyes locked on her.

"I know both of you have problems, but you don't need to take it out on each other." Splashflight meowed. "Believe me, I've had plenty of problems too. But we can't take them out on other cats. Especially Clan leaders."

I patted a little closer to Darkpaw. That speech was beautiful.

It still is.

Everyone looked board as the patrol returned with Waterstar at the head. He stopped abruptly, puzzled.

"Why is no one on patrol?" Waterstar hissed as he stalked into his den. Darkpaw and I lingered outside, still within hearing distance.

"Don't worry, I've got it all under control," Thornwillow meowed. "An apprentice is doing all the hunting today. Everyone is well-fed."

Waterstar scoffed. "An apprentice, you say. Why on StarClan's green land would an *apprentice* volunteer to hunt for the entire Clan?"

"It wasn't a volunteer: it was a punishment."

Waterstar's voice sounded confused. "For who?"

"Soulpaw."

I patted away. I had heard enough. I noticed that Darkpaw was still listening - I don't even think that he noticed me walking away. I sighed. My sister is in trouble again. I wonder what she did this time.

As I sat down and groomed myself, I saw Soulpaw pad towards me with prey. Rabbit. My favorite.

She purposely chose my favorite. Why?

Soulpaw stopped right in front of me and dropped the rabbit. She glared at me.

"This is all your fault. Why do you have to be *soo* perfect? You've got the perfect mentor, perfect life, and no punishments. I hate you!"

I heard gasps from around me.

"Soulpaw! How dare you speak to my apprentice like that!" Splashflight snarled as she stalked across the clearing to her.

"Splashflight, no. I'm going to handle this myself: in a duel. I need to stop hiding behind other cats." I meowed.

Splashflight's eyes widened. "No! You can't do that!"

I shook my head. "I have to." I turned toward Soulpaw, who looked a little shocked. "After this piece of prey, everything will be over," I growled, low enough so only she could hear.

Soulpaw just nodded and left me alone with my rabbit. But then she turned back and hissed, "Do you think I care if I die? What would the Clan think if you came back with my dead body? You'd be breaking the code. Imagine - having the guilt of killing your own sister on you. No one would look at you the same way anymore.

Remember that, Lightpaw."

A chill ran down my spine. I take a bite out of my rabbit. It tasted a bit off, I noticed. But I ignored it. What could be worse than what Soulpaw just said?

Am I really going to kill my own sister?

Chapter 4: A Shadow Over Our Souls

🌺Soulpaw🌺

I paced excitedly far from the RiverClan camp. I snickered to myself. Lightpaw will never keep up, especially after eating rotten meat! Suddenly, there was rustling in some nearby bushes.

"I'm here."

Lightpaw's voice sounded icy cold, but Soulpaw wasn't fooled. Her sister was scared. *And she should be.*

"Why do we have to fight?" her sister mewed. "Why do you think I'm better than you?"

"It's all because of that day," I hissed. "You said that I was the one that brought us out there, and they believed it."

I closed my eyes, not wanting to see Lightpaw's expression. Instead, I found myself in the memories of that day...

...

It was their first day as apprentices.

"Lightpaw!" I whispered. My sister looked at me.

"What?" Lightpaw asked.

"I'm going out to explore, stay here, - and if someone asks - say I'm gone to the dirtplace." I meowed.

Lightpaw frowned. "Can't I come with you?" she pleaded.

I smirked. "Are you sure that you can handle it?"

"If you can, then I can!"

...

We crept out of camp that night.

"Wow, our territory is beautiful!" Lightpaw exclaimed. Then she scowled. "What's that smell?"

I sniffed. "We're close to the ShadowClan border, so it's probably just ShadowClan scent."

Lightpaw pawed at the ground as they walked. "You're so lucky that your mentor took you out today," she complained. "Splashflight said that I should rest until tomorrow."

I laughed. "Be glad - I'd rather be resting than checking the elders for ticks!"

Lightpaw twitched her whiskers in amusement.

I skidded to a halt about a fox-length from the border. Lightpaw's tail drooped in disappointment.

"We're already at the border?" she cried. "Not fair!"

I put my tail over her mouth. "Shh, remember, we're not supposed to be out here."

"Oh, right." She agreed under my tail.

We were about to walk home when a strange smell hit my nose. Was that... no, couldn't be. Wasn't a fox, since Rosedapple showed me what that smell was like when we came across some dung. Wasn't the scent of prey - knew what that smelled like. So what was it?

To be honest, I didn't want to find out.

"Hey, what's that smell?" Lightpaw inquired, mouth gaping open.

I didn't want to worry her, so I replied, "Just some fox dung."

"Really? I never knew that fox dung smelled like that!"

I was starting to panic as the scent got a bit stronger. This wasn't a good idea.

"Let's race back to camp," I suggested and started running. I heard rapid paws thumping on the ground behind me. Suddenly, they faded and a piercing wail of terror hit my ears.

I turned back to see a massive badger cornering Lightpaw. It let out a loud, menacing growl.

"Soulpaw, help!"

I was frozen to the ground. Two newly made apprentices were no match for a badger. Especially ones that go exploring at night and have no idea what they're doing.

I was aware of a battle cry in the distance. Four cats raced towards the badger, Redwhisker, Splashflight, Fluffheart, and Toothjaw.

Three cats attacked the badger while Toothjaw helped Lightpaw to safety. He narrowed his eyes angrily.

"Who's idea was this?" he hissed.

I stepped forward. "Mine." I meowed.

"You're lucky that we heard that badger and your plea for help," Toothjaw growled. "I'm just being nice. The others won't be as easy on you."

I didn't reply. Instead, I watched as the badger was driven away, never to return. Hopefully.

Toothjaw shook his head and padded in the direction of the camp. The warriors that drove the badger away were coming towards Lightpaw and me.

I glanced at my sister: she looked absolutely terrified. I would've felt the same way.

"Lightpaw!" Splashflight yowled as she rushed up to her apprentice. "Are you okay?"

Lightpaw, still shaking, nodded.

Splashflight sent me a glare that not even Waterstar could snap to.

"What were you thinking, sending my apprentice out here!"

"She chose to come!" I protested.

"So? I thought you could've been more responsible than this, Soulpaw. Were you trying to get me in trouble with Waterstar? Do you want him to punish me and abuse me? Do you?" Splashflight snarled. Her tone was icily slow.

Before I could reply, Fluffheart entered the conversation.

"Splashflight, how about you come with me and calm down a bit?" he mewed.

Splashflight nodded and headed away with her brother. Then she stopped and called for Lightpaw to come with them.

Lightpaw shot me an icy glance and padded away.

Did she really think this was my fault?

As I looked after Lightpaw, the first light of dawn hit me.

...

I had made my decision: Lightpaw wasn't the bad one: I was. And I was going to pay for it.

I slowly turned toward the stream in our territory. I needed to do this. *I deserved it.*

Chapter 5: Sorry, But Not Sorry

□Lightpaw□

Everyone has those moments where time stops. Not really. But that's what I felt like, as I watched my sister end her life by jumping into a stream and drowning herself. But what could I do? Jump in with her?

Cats stared as I patted through the camp entrance, alone. Toothjaw gave me a questioning look but I ignored it. I went straight to Waterstar's den, feeling emotionless. But a familiar cat stopped me from heading there.

"Lightpaw? Where's Soulpaw?" Darkpaw meowed. "Everyone's been anxious about you two."

"Soulpaw is gone." I snapped. "Now go away."

Darkpaw looked shocked and sadly patted away. But I didn't care: I had made a decision on my way back from the 'accident'. I was going to join one of the most feared Clans. ShadowClan. ThunderClan was too far away, and I wanted to prove that I wasn't a cringy, spoiled little apprentice. I was going to show them what I was capable of.

I walked into Waterstar's den, ready to announce my decision.

Waterstar looked up from his grooming and tilted his head questionably.

"Lightpaw? What happened?"

"Soulpaw's dead. Drowned herself in a stream. One less nuisance to deal with." I replied.

Waterstar just gaped at me. "You hated your sister that much?" he asked in disbelief.

I shrugged. "Anyway, I don't want to stay in RiverClan anymore. Can I go to ShadowClan?"

Waterstar hissed furiously. "How dare you make such a demand!? We need to morn over your sister! You might hate her, but there are some cats that like her. I think you know who I'm talking about." He spat as he stalked out of his den, leaving me behind.

I knew exactly who he was talking about. Palepaw. My other brother. He wouldn't take this well. Like I care.

"Lightpaw."

Waterstar poked his head back into the den. "Come stand with me on the branch of the willow tree." He snarled.

I followed him up to stand with him as he called a meeting.

Cats came out of their dens, even the queens. I gazed at Blazekit, who had crept outside to listen. He was five moons now, he would be apprenticed soon. Probably to Sweetpelt, who hasn't had an apprentice for moons. I thought about taking him with me, but it wouldn't work. Blazekit was the only kit of Streamfrost's 'litter', so he would have eyes on him at all times. As Waterstar started speaking to the Clan, I thought about Blazekit's warrior name. I just knew that he would become a warrior. I just knew. I thought of different names like Blazeclaw, Blazepelt, Blazefur. But they didn't seem right for him. He was a curious, funny, and kind of shy at times type of kit. I stopped focusing on him and started listening to Waterstar.

"- so we'll morn Soulpaw's death now, and make sure no apprentices fight anymore. That's all."

The whole Clan looked stunned by that news, but only Palepaw, Darkpaw, and Rosedapple looked depressed by it.

Waterstar leaped from the branch, and back into his den. I sighed. RiverClan is falling apart.

And so am I. Did everyone think that I was going insane? No, of course not, because no one knows of my secret plan. I was *going* to

join ShadowClan because no one can stop me.

Not even Waterstar.

Chapter 6: No Motivation

Soulpaw

I thrashed around in the stream, trying to grab a branch or something. Lightpaw was even more mouse-brained than I thought. Did she think that I was going to drown myself?

My eyes stung from the water and my vision was blurry. But that didn't stop me from seeing an easy-to-reach bank up ahead. I grabbed ahold of it and lifted myself. I was in an unfamiliar area with no warriors or help with me. How bad could this be?

So mouse-brained. Why can't I swim like all of the other RiverClan cats? *Because you're not pure RiverClan, maybe not even RiverClan at all.*

I looked around. Some trees, and prey. Prey! I didn't even realize that I was starving. I saw a squirrel over near a tree. I used what little I had learned and started to creep up from behind the squirrel. I pounced and...

"What do you think you're doing?"

I stopped mid-pounce and fell to the ground. The squirrel ran into a red-colored she-cat's claws and met its fate. She looked at me with narrowed eyes.

"This is *our* hunting grounds, stray. Now scram," she ordered. I shrunk under her intense glare.

"I'm sorry, I'm just a little lost," I confessed.

The she-cat scoffed. "Lost? Here? You must have come a long way." She examined me. "Say, you do look quite young to be wandering alone. Where did you come from?"

"I come from RiverClan. Where did you come from?" I inquired.

The she-cat looked confused. "RiverClan? Never heard of it. I come from the Tribe of Clear Skies, little one."

I cocked my head. "Really? So you don't use the same naming process?"

"Naming process? What did they name you?" The she-cat asked.

"Soulpaw. I'm only an apprentice."

The she-cat blinked. "So, all apprentices in your Clan have the word 'paw' in them?"

I nodded. "Exactly. Then it changes once you get to be a warrior or a medicine cat."

The she-cat looked puzzled once more. "Come again?"

So she doesn't know about the Clan traditions. Just great.

"You know what? Just never mind. By the way, I never got *your* name." I meowed.

"Hm? Oh, forgive me. I wasn't taught to introduce myself to trespassers." The sarcasm was clear in her voice. "But you seem alright. Just don't go talking about it, ok?"

"Of course, but I don't think my Clan would know you anyway," I agreed.

"The name's Hunter That Waits For Prey," she announced.

I blinked. "What?"

The she-cat laughed. "Just call me Hunter."

What kind of name was that? What was the point of having a long name when you're just going to make it a short one?

"Wow, that's a complex name," I observed.

Hunter shook her head. "Not for me, it isn't."

I looked down. Wait, I still needed to ask for some directions to get back home!

"I know you don't know where the Clans are, but could you point me in the right direction?" I asked.

Hunter rolled her eyes in annoyance. "As I told you, I don't know *where* you came from. But... maybe Skywatcher could help you."

"Who?"

"Our leader, and my mother," Hunter answered.

Before I could reply, I heard thunder in the sky. Really loud thunder. I knew what that meant. I remember when I first heard it when I was out hunting with Rosedapple.

Boom

I flinched. What in StarClan was that? I felt rain tickle my fur. I looked around for my mentor.

"Rosedapple?" I yowled with rising fear. Nothing.

It's okay, I told myself. I know where the camp is. As I started to backtrack to the camp, I thought about happy things to calm me down. Memories of me and my sister, Lightpaw. I remembered when we used to play together as kits. But as soon as we left the nursery behind, Lightpaw suddenly wanted to be the best at everything. And she was. Perfect little Lightpaw. Splashflight couldn't be more proud. I'm always-

Crack

A huge light of some sort lit up the sky, sending me running straight to the camp. That was the most fear I've ever felt in my life.

Too bad even worse was to come as Hunter guided me to her camp.

Chapter 7: Betrayal

□Lightpaw□

As night was closing in, I started to head toward the apprentice den. The entire day, cats had been glancing at me as if I was a murderer or something. It's not my fault Soulpaw was jealous that I was doing well on my assignments! I growled to myself and pawed at the ground angrily.

"Lightpaw? You're supposed to be in the apprentice den."

I looked up from my sulking and saw my mentor in front of me. Mouse dung.

"I couldn't sleep..." I lied. "I was hoping you could give me some advice about how to deal with trauma like this."

Splashflight stared at me for a good second and then relief clouded her eyes.

"So, you do feel bad? I'm glad you feel some remorse for your sister, Lightpaw."

I shook my head. "No! I have no guilt in this. Why should I feel bad!? Why is everyone talking about how I don't feel bad for her death!?" I screeched.

Startled by my sudden burst of anger, Splashflight took a step back. Then her eyes were shrouded with confusion. I followed her eyes to see Darkpaw and hesitantly, Palepaw standing behind us. *Oh, StarClan, why?*

Splashflight blinked. "Why are *all* of you up? This doesn't concern you two."

Palepaw stepped forward. "But it does. This is our situation, and we want to hear your advice too."

Splashflight scoffed. "What makes you think my advice will help you? I'm just gonna tell you my own experience."

It was Darkpaw's turn to speak. "Because we heard what happened."

Now it was my turn to be shocked along with Splashflight.

"What are you talking about?" I questioned, flabbergasted.

"Splashflight's-"

"Nothing!" Splashflight quickly intervened in Darkpaw's response. I raised my eyebrow questioningly.

"Splashflight, what's going on?" I meowed.

Splashflight sighed in defeat. "I guess I should start from the beginning... It all started with a she-cat named Cloudsky. She-"

"Wait you like she-cats-"

"No!" Splashflight cried, interrupting my question. "You know what, I think you need some sleep if you're saying ridiculous things like that," she added.

"You're right, Splashflight. I'm heading to the apprentice den. Good night guys," Palepaw mewed, turning around and leaving.

I stared at my oldest brother as he left. That's it? He goes through all that trouble for that? Mouse-brain.

I shared a glance with Darkpaw. He seemed to be thinking the same thing as I: Should we inform Splashflight about our intentions?

No, it was too risky. What if she stopped us, or worse, told the entire Clan? Would we be exiled? I didn't want to find out.

I faked a yawn. "You know what, I think I'm going to sleep too. See you in the morning, Splashflight."

Splashflight seemed surprised about my sudden change in behavior. But she didn't stop me as I headed towards the apprentice den with

my younger brother behind me.

The second we were in, Palepaw questioned our actions.

"There's no way you guys are tired. I've seen you stay up all night." He meowed. "What are you planning this time?"

I hesitated. Should I tell him? I mean, he is my brother after all.

"Lightpaw, Darkpaw, I promise I won't tell anybody," Palepaw added with a hint of desperation. "Maybe I could help."

Before I could make up my mind, Darkpaw spoke.

"Palepaw, we're going to ShadowClan."

Palepaw's eyes stretched wide. "What? Why? You're coming back, right?" he stammered.

I shook my head. "No, we're not. But you need to keep quiet about this, okay? If they ask where we are, just say you don't know anything."

Palepaw just slowly nodded. "Okay... but *why* are you leaving?" he asked.

"I-it's complicated. Just trust us, okay?" Darkpaw pleated.

Palepaw straightened up with a determined look on his expression. His eyes glowed with mischief.

"Well then, I have the perfect plan to help you escape."

Chapter 8: Feelings

Soulpaw

Soulpaw followed Hunter as she lead her to her camp.

The walk to 'the cave' as Hunter called it, was silent for the most part except for the occasional sound of prey scurrying underneath bushes and trees.

After what felt like two sunrises of trudging through the pouring rain, the two she-cats finally arrived to Hunter's camp - or - cave as Hunter called it.

Upon entering the cave, many of the Tribe cats were giving the two of us strange looks: they were mostly directed towards me though, I noticed.

Nothing I can't handle, Soulpaw mused to herself with a flick of her tail. *Having cats whisper about me is better than having to deal with Lightpaw and her oh-so-perfect life!*

Soulpaw was brought out of her thoughts by Hunter nudging her side with a paw.

"Hey Soulpaw! You coming inside the cave or not?" Hunter mewed with a glint of amusement in her eyes.

I nodded my head rapidly and Hunter turned back around with a small wink in my direction.

Soulpaw's pelt burned and she felt her heart hammering heavily in her chest. *What in StarClan's name is wrong with me?* Soulpaw mentally screamed in her mind.

Soulpaw sighed softly to herself and shook her head back-and-forth. *Oh StarClan, what is wrong with me? Why am I feeling this way around Hunter? Is there something I'm missing here?* Soulpaw shook her head, trying to rap her head around the fact that she might be in love

with Hunter.

Shaking her head to clear her thoughts, she continued following Hunter through the cave.

As Hunter lead me through the cave, I kept getting stares from the cats. Don't forget the whispers too. Things like *'why's that cat here'* or *'we already have enough mouths to feed'* as for the latter, I don't think they have enough. The cave also had a weird hole in the top of it. It was perfectly circular as if it were carved. *Probably not by them,* I thought.

"Hunter!" An older, red tom bounded up to us. "Why are you back - oh? Who's this guest?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but Hunter cut me off.

"Oh, her name's Soulpaw. Comes from somewhere called the 'Clans'. Got a little lost though." She twitched her whiskers in amusement. I felt warm and very embarrassed.

The red tom glanced at me, eyes widening in sympathy. "Oh my, you must be worried huh?" he asked. I nodded. "Well, I'm sure Gol- I mean, Skywatcher could help you!" he offered.

As he turned to presumably get this 'Skywatcher', my attention switched to their fresh kill pile. I licked my lips hungrily. I haven't eaten since this morning.

"You hungry?"

Hunter's question startled me.

"I uh, I mean kinda... if you have enough of course! I-I'm perfectly content to wait if-" she put her paw on my mouth.

"Oh shut up," Hunter said playfully, removing her paw from my lips. "There's plenty for everyone."

I just stood there, speechless. I tried to open my mouth to speak and failed. That warmth was returning.

Hunter's playful expression faded. "Are you okay? You sick or something?"

"H-huh?" Those were the only words I could get out.

Hunter leaned closer. "Your face is red."

That was probably the most humiliating moment in my life. I just, the way Hunter spoke, always full of sass, was... amazing. Right now, I didn't want to return home.

I could stay here, forever.

Lost in my dreamy thoughts, I didn't even pay attention when Hunter started calling my name. Well, I did, it just sounded so far away. Was it just me, or did her voice sound even better when she said my name? *I think so.*

"Soulpaw! Just say my name!" Hunter started to tap my shoulder.

Oh, Hunter, don't worry, I will.

Chapter 9: We Need To Talk

✿Goldenflow✿

Goldenflow stepped into the medicine den, where she saw Rushingwater sorting herbs into neat piles.

He looked up from his sorting work upon seeing the golden she-cat standing in front of him.

"Hello Goldenflow," he meowed, blinking and tilting his head to the side.

Goldenflow rolled her eyes and flicked her tail from left to right.

"We need to talk, Rushingwater." She meowed in a matter-of-fact tone.

Rushingwater just stared at her.

"Talk about what?" he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Goldenflow scowled and cuffed her former apprentice over the head with one of her golden-colored paws.

"Just shut up and listen!" she hissed angrily at him.

Rushingwater wilted a bit under Goldenflow's harsh glare.

Then Goldenflow softened a little and she sighed, glancing away. "You need to know the truth, Rushingwater. About what happened the night I was exiled. And about what happened in my time away from RiverClan."

Rushingwater remained silent, as if now he were afraid to speak. Did he do it in fear of what Goldenflow was capable of?

"I was given a prophecy. But I swore a vow to secrecy. Mothstar knew that something was going on and demanded answers. But I

refused to say a word. So she began to take her own lives: clawing her neck over and over to make each slip away. She thought StarClan would reveal my secrets to her if she visited them. But Mothstar ran out of lives to use. If StarClan had told her anything, she would have never been able to do anything about it. But I was left in the den, my paws soaked in our leader's blood. I had no chance to explain myself when the Clan discovered Mothstar's demise. It looked like I had killed her, when I'd only been trying to stop the madness."

In response, Rushingwater's eyes grew wide. He parted his jaws to speak, but Goldenflow growled, waving her tail as an order for her old apprentice to remain quiet.

"In my exile, I met with Redwing of ThunderClan. And the two of us made the journey, following what we were told in the prophecy. We stumbled upon a Tribe - The Tribe of Clear Skies. It was the place StarClan had wanted us to find. There, we created new lives for ourselves, and fulfilled our destiny. But... Redwing died. And Silvershore sacrificed her spirit to defeat the evil we had been sent to vanquish. It was hard, living withouit them. But in the end, I found love in the tom you've come to know as Foxheart. And together, we had two wonderful kits." Goldenflow turned to look outside the den, her eye brimming with love. Just outside, Sunpaw and Redpaw were standing beneath the willow tree, Waterstar looming above them on a branch. Sunlight shined off his pelt, giving him an almost holy glow.

"Let all cats old enough to swim gather here beneath the willow tree for a Clan meeting," he summoned. Goldenflow looked back at Rushingwater. Her expression had shifted from one of cold anger, to one of kind softness.

A smile bloomed on her face, and Rushingwater began to relax. With a flick of her tail, Goldenflow beckoned him to accompany her to the meeting. The two medicine cats sat together at the edge of the crowd, just as the ceremony started.

"I, Waterstar, leader of RiverClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on these apprentices. They have trained hard to learn the ways of your noble code and I commend them to you as warrior

in their turn. Sunpaw, Redpaw; do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend this Clan, even at the cost of your lives?"

"I do," meowed the two cats in unison, and Goldenflow felt her heart brimming with joy.

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior names. Sunpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Sunleaf. StarClan honors your skills and strength, and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan."

At his announcement, Waterstar leaped down from his perch and approached the newly named warrior. He rested his chin upon her head, and Sunleaf licked his shoulder respectfully in response.

Then Waterstar pulled back to focus on Redpaw. "Redpaw, from this moment on you will be known as Redberry. StarClan honors your cunning spirit and swiftness, and we welcome you as a full warrior of RiverClan." Waterstar repeated the same motion with the newly named Redberry, who licked her leader's shoulder in turn.

As Waterstar took a pace back once again, Goldenflow caterwauled; "Sunleaf! Redberry!" "Sunleaf! Redberry! Sunleaf! Redberry!" Rushingwater and the rest of the Clan cheered.

Happy tears stung at the edges of Goldenflow's eyes as she joined her Clan in a welcoming call, exchanging a glance with her old apprentice, Rushingwater, who nodded at her in return.

Rushingwater smiled at her as he yowled out, eyes glittering with understanding. A peace settled within Goldenflow soul and she at last felt grateful to be back in RiverClan.

Chapter 10: Lending A Helping Paw

Lightpaw

Palepaw had kept his word, helping both Lightpaw and Darkpaw figure out a plan so that the two of them could sneak out of camp.

It was the morning of the day that both Darkpaw and Lightpaw would be leaving RiverClan.

Lightpaw was currently sitting at the fresh-kill pile and finishing the starling that she had chosen for her meal.

"Lightpaw!"

Lightpaw was sitting in the sun and grooming herself when another cat patted over to her.

It was Sunleaf, one of the daughters of the Clan's eldest medicine cat, Goldenflow.

"Huh? What is it, Sunleaf?"

"Where are you and Darkpaw going?" She asked her questioningly.

Lightpaw stopped grooming her paws to look up at Sunleaf. Her brown eyes gleamed like amber in the early morning light of predawn.

At that very moment, Lightpaw felt like all was right with the world. Sunleaf had a heart of gold, and the warmth and brightness of the sun shone in her beautiful smile .

Lightpaw opened her mouth to speak but no words would come to her mind.

"Sunleaf! Lightpaw!"

The two she-cats turned towards the owner of the voice.

It was Goldenflow.

"Hey mother!" Sunleaf mewed in greeting, rushing up to the older she-cat, purring contentedly, and gently nuzzling her own head along the underside of the medicine cat's flank of silky, soft, sun-kissed golden fur.

The older she-cat smiled warmly in return, purring loudly, bending her head a little closer toward Sunleaf, and placing a few soft but gentle series of licks to her daughter's forehead.

"Hello, Sunleaf!" Goldenflow purred softly, blue eyes gleaming brightly with nothing but love as she turned to give her daughter a warm smile. "Where's Hunter - I-I mean Redberry?"

Sunleaf chuckled and twitched her whiskers in amusement at her mother's accidental slip up of once again using their birth names instead of their newly acquired warrior names given to them by Waterstar himself.

Goldenflow's head lowered in a moment of unconcealed embarrassment for a few more seconds before she regained her composure and mustered the courage to look back up at the two young cats currently standing right in front of her.

"Heh heh, sorry about that!" she meowed in an anxious tone. "I'm still a little miffed about this whole thing - and am still *to this day* trying to wrap my head around the idea that Waterstar *actually* let me come back into RiverClan to begin with." The medicine cat giggled nervously and shifted uneasily from paw to paw as she talked.

Through all the jumbled mess that was Goldenflow's messy spiderweb-like threads of anxious thoughts and fears, there was one thing in particular that caught Lightpaw's attention.

"Hunter? Who's Hunter?" Came Lightpaw's voice from behind them. "There's no cat in RiverClan with a name like that as far as I know anyway."

She paused for a moment and took a few deep breaths before speaking again. "I'm gonna take a little guess here and say that this 'Hunter' cat you mentioned is somebody you met back when you were living with 'The Tribe of Clear Skies' am I right?"

"That's the name given to Redberry when she was born." Goldenflow replied with a small smile. "Her Tribe name was Hunter That Waits For Prey, and Sunleaf's Tribe name was Breeze Caught In Storm."

Lightpaw's blue eyes grew wide in shock. "Wait really? What about you and Foxheart?"

Goldenflow purred softly in responce. "Foxheart's Tribe name was Fox That Hides When Hunted, and my Tribe name was Golden That Flows Through The Stream."

It was silent for a few moments before Lightpaw spoke up once more.

"So, what did you call us for?" She asked the medicine cat. "Is there something you need our help with?"

The medicine cat chuckled and flicked her tail, motioning with her head for them to follow her.

Lightpaw and Sunleaf patted into the medicine cat's den with Goldenflow at the head.

"Rushingwater is delivering catmint to ShadowClan, and there's a half-moon tonight. But I need to gather the necessary herbs for travel." The older she-cat paused to take a breath before speaking again. "Could the two of you do me a huge favor?" She asked the two younger cats.

Lightpaw and Sunleaf both nodded and Goldenflow sighed in relief.

"Could the two of you help me gather some herbs before I have to leave?"

"Of course we can help!" Sunleaf was the first to speak, smiling brightly and flicking her tail from left to right.

She then turned to face Lightpaw. "Won't we, Lightpaw?" She meowed, nudging the white she-cat in the side with a paw.

After a few more moments of awkward silence, Lightpaw nodded her head and together, the three cats headed out of camp and deep into the forest.